

EDITORIAL: A safe place for pets

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Difficulty securing shelter for pets is one reason people didn't evacuate before Hurricane Katrina, and some storm victims even declined rescue efforts because they would have had to leave a beloved animal behind.

Those choices cost some people their lives, and giving pet owners another option -- a shelter specifically for animals -- will protect human life, too. That's what Louisiana State University, the Humane Society of the United States and Dixon Correctional Institutions in East Feliciana Parish have teamed up to provide.

The Humane Society has donated \$600,000 for an evacuation center and veterinary clinic that will be built, using inmate labor, on the grounds of the medium security prison that's located 25 miles from LSU. The shelter, which will be open by the next hurricane season, will be able to accommodate 300 to 500 animals, and there will be room for expansion.

The facility will be useful even when weather is calm. It will serve as a clinic for strays picked up in the Baton Rouge area, and LSU's School of Veterinary Medicine, which is helping staff the clinic, will train students there. The prison will incorporate the center into its rehabilitation program. Inmates will train animals to serve as guide dogs for the blind and companion animals for the elderly.

Hurricane Katrina proved how important people's pets are to them; this facility demonstrates the many ways that helping animals can help people.